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Deconstructing Postmodernism and the Mainstream Developmental Discourse of Women's Empowerment in the (South) Asian Context

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Abstract:

This paper starts with an initial gesture accepting the validity of many of the criticisms of modernity by some leading postmodern thinkers. From this initial position, it then evaluates the postmodernist positions themselves with regards to democracy, women's empowerment and justice by paying careful attention to the arguments of these leading postmodernists. It then develops a theory of deep democracy and radical subjectivity which can be used to deconstruct the rhetoric of international organizations on women's empowerment. However, shallow and self-serving as this rhetoric is, it nevertheless can lead to a limited improvement in women's status contrary to the claims of the conservatives. Furthermore, the theory can also be used to de/reconstruct the liberal and social democratic positions on women's empowerment. Such a deep democratic perspective in South Asia focuses attention on enhancing social capabilities through all means, but most importantly through the political self-activities of the multitude---- particularly the radical subjectivities and actions of the most oppressed women who can and will increasingly take leading roles in overcoming the rule of global capital.

This paper has at least two objectives. One is to offer a way out of the nihilistic and relativist varieties of postmodernism without falling prey to the fallacies and rigidities of modernism. The second objective is to apply the theory of critical deconstruction developed through this attempt at overcoming both modernity and postmodernity to the substantive problem of women's empowerment.

The observation that there has been an increasing intensity and extensive talk of women's empowerment in the mainstream development communities is hardly novel. However, the question whether such talk is sensible is not a trivial one. At least taking this question seriously and exploring its rhetorical and other dimensions analytically is one objective of this paper. However, unpacking the idea of sensibility in this context requires a certain special kind of deconstruction of both political and philosophical signifying gestures. It will be seen at the end that the rhetorical trope of empowerment is not policy neutral. But both conservatives and liberals---and even some radicals---are likely to be disappointed by my results. Against the conservatives I will show that the rhetorical trope of empowerment can or perhaps even does lead to improvements in women's well-being that just the operations of market forces can not bring about by themselves. Against the liberals I will show that the rhetorical trope of empowerment runs up against inevitable limits which can not be

overcome within the liberal discursive and policy practices. A more radical series of gestures and practices is called for at the end. Mobilizing such a strategy is the result of a positive reworking of the idea of deconstruction the beginnings of which can be found in my earlier work.[1]However, a positive deconstruction analogous to the positive ontology found in the recent work of Negri and Agamben[2] needs to be developed explicitly in order to address concrete issues such as women's empowerment in anything other than a negative critical semiotics. The first few sections of this essay attempt this logically and ontologically prior task.

I. De/Re-constructions: a matter of mere procedure?

At the very outset the question of doubt including doubting the methodology of deconstruction is a necessary danger that I want to embrace in the spirit of early Derrida, for example, the Derrida of "Structure, Sign and Play". But I want to go back a bit further than Nietzsche as Derrida does in his essay. I will go back to Hume and, and raise the skeptical question in its full force.

Are there facts of the matter, as a Humean might ask? Or, is such talk about alleged facts--- for example, women's empowerment--- either tautological, or worse, a complete fiction? Such skeptical thoughts may seem inappropriate to practical-minded people cheering for global democracy including women's empowerment, as if it is already here, or at worst on the way. As if

[1] See in particular, H.A. Khan, 1998, Technology, Development and Democracy, chapters 6-8.
[2] See Agamben(1999) aand Negri(1984;2003)

echoing E. M. Forster's two cheers for democracy[3] we are witnessing a global spectacle of democratic rhetoric. However, whether this rhetoric resembles reality or is altogether a simulacrum displayed on a mass scale to a global audience is a difficult question to answer. The rhetoric on democracy and empowerment has also been joined by the rhetoric of free markets. This juxtaposition of democracy and markets makes it even more difficult to sort out the relationships that create the ensemble we may choose to call the political economy of democracy and empowerment. Postmodern technology and discourse both have a deep and ambiguous role to play in this ensemble. We need to know what this role is precisely.

In this paper I want to argue that getting the theory right is crucial if we are ever to make our way beyond the rhetorical assertions regarding empowerment,rights, markets, democracy and justice. Although I begin in a (postmodern) Humean note of skepticism, my ultimate purpose is to go beyond both modernist social science and postmodern nihilism. Challenging the fashions in this manner is not always fashionable. But going beyond the tired old dogmas of human rights and democracy while staying clear of a shallow skepticism that leads ultimately to relativism and nihilism demands defying the codes of contemporary academic fashion. The argument that unfolds begins by interrogating the postmodern deconstruction of modernism and then goes beyond such deconstructive gestures. I promise the reader that eventually fictions are read as fictions in order to uncover deeper frictions in the heart of our socio-economic world and discourses of empowerment in such a world. Such a reading of fictions of the political and the economic marketplace also shows the **fictions** to be **"factions**", i.e., a mixture of **facts** and

[3] E. M. Forster (1951), 'What I believe' in Two Cheers for Democracy, New York: Harcourt and Brace, p. 70.

fictions, arising from and leading towards a certain structure of social **action**. The end result is the discovery that a deep theory of democracy can critically expose the limits of the superficial attempts to build a democratic global society that claims to have already empowered the historically most exploited, namely women from the oppressed classes. At the same time the proposed theory offers a more radical and profound motivation for engagement to build deep democratic structures both locally and globally in order for the oppressed with the oppressed women in the vanguard to emancipate themselves and the rest of humanity.

Ever since our cultural discourse moved into the "postmodern condition", questions regarding truth and justice have generated suspicion. We seem to be shy even of raising the questions. Unlike Pontius Pilate, who reportedly raised the question but would not wait for an answer, the postmodern gesture is to point at the futility of the question itself. If there is no point in truth, then the truth in the context of elusive concepts such as justice or freedom in general, or economic justice or democracy, in particular, would seem to be beside the point.

Modern economists, in particular, have progressively abandoned the territory they call normative economics. Even within the utilitarian tradition the move from cardinal to ordinal utility meant giving up any kind of interpersonal comparisons. Lately, the move to identify economic discourse as simply rhetorical has generated both tolerance of and skepticism about normative issues. This is an important paradox that needs to be addressed.

The value of looking at the rhetorical aspects of economics and politics is undeniable. Skepticism, at least as an initial methodological gesture in the Cartesian sense, is also valuable. However, much of substantive value is also at stake here. If rhetoric and skepticism are also the endpoint of the inquiry then we are left at best with a Humean empiricist way of looking at the world. Justice, in particular economic justice, can then be nothing more than a prudent convention simply because we are not better, nobler beings than we appear to be. Likewise for women's empowerment.

Is there any way then to come to terms with postmodern skepticism of democracy,empowerment and economic justice? It is not an easy task once the fundamental premises of modernism are interrogated.

An initial gesture of doubting is made necessary simply because of the foundational approach of modern political and economic theory. One might look for ways to deconstruct such writing as there is, on economic justice by way of supplement, trace and difference in a Derridean fashion. Such textual analysis can expose the play of metonymy and metaphor even in supposedly rigorous and uncontroversial neoclassical writing. However, I will take a not unrelated but still somewhat different path here. I will interrogate some of the foundational premises of modernism in order to construct an alternative, non-foundational approach to economic justice,empowerment and democracy. Leaving epistemological and ontological assumptions of modernism behind - one might think - would lead us to a terrain more amenable to the discussion of normative issues of justice. However,as I have already hinted, here we will come up against some further problems raised by postmodernism. Put succinctly, the problem is as follows: is it possible to give up all the modernist assumptions and end up with anything but nihilism? This way of putting the question carries some force. Indeed there are many postmodernists who accept nihilism as the logical (?) outcome of their positions. If true, then a discourse on economic justice (or any other kind of justice)or democracy is simply a logocentric exercise. Perhaps justice, democracy and empowerment also need to be deconstructed, even destroyed (*destruktion* in Heidegger's language). However, following a modal logic consistent with the movement away from the modernist binary logic one can actually deny that a denial of some of modernist assumptions will inevitably lead to nihilism with respect to normative issues such as justice.[4] The same modal logic allows one to also hold, without holding onto transcendental versions of modernism, that a deconstruction of economic justice is only a necessary preamble to an equally necessary constructive discourse on justice. Thus, once again, the aim of this paper is to rescue democracy, empowerment and economic justice from floundering by overcoming the conscious or unconscious epistemological commitments of both modernism and postmodernism. In order to fix ideas and put the positions developed later in perspective I begin with a brief discussion of modernism and postmodernism in general. I then look at some of the claims advanced by postmodernists such as Foucault, Braudrillard, Rorty and Lyotard about normativity in general under postmodernism.[5] The problems for a discourse on

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[4] This line of thought also has an irresistible Madhyamika tendency in the tradition of the famous Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna. With his fourfold negation of propositions (Catuskoti), Nagarjuna provides a rigorous way of proceeding beyond both Aristotlean and dialectical logic.With the exception of one study on Derrida and Nagarjuna, most postmodernists seem not of have noticed this connection.

[5]I have not here distinguished between postmodernism and poststructuralism. Instead of an exegesis of schools of thought I am interested in specific premises, arguments and conclusions of particular thinkers. Postmodernism serves as a broad enough umbrella to include many such thinkers. As I discuss in the next section, in this sense, postmodernism can be contrasted usefully with modernism. The proof of the intellectual pudding,

economic justice if such claims can be accepted can be recognized quite easily after this exercise. I then discuss the undiscussable, namely economic justice,empowerment and democracy without modernist assumptions.[6] In the process of doing so I necessarily take a critical view of some of the positions articulated by the postmodernists mentioned before. However, this does not lead, I believe, back to the camp of conventional modernism. In fact without being a camp follower I am able to travel some distance with Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari and even Nietzsche.[7] However, the conclusion is that justice and empowerment, in particular economic justice and economic empowerment, are too important to leave to only French, German and American postmodern philosophers (living and dead). Economists and other social scientists need to create a conversation among themselves in this arena. One long dead German philosopher, Hegel, can surprisingly be brought to life in this context. I show how a particular reading of Hegel can help in the positive discussion of rights, freedom, democracy and justice without foundations .[8]With this restoration, in the postmodern context, the fictions about democracy and justice are exposed, and thus deeper forms of both democracy and justice can be explored in a world of economic frictions and political conflicts. It turns out that this is also a world of hope, struggle and 'postmodern' possibilities.

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however, is in the structure of specific arguments and not in how the arguments are labeled. However, I do emphasize the commonality among the individual thinkers whenever it exists. The more complex evolution of Foucault's thought is addresses in Khan (2001).

[6] As the technically informed reader may guess, the Arrow-Debreu general equilibrium model and the two fundamental theorems of existence and optimality of general equilibrium are rejected here. This is for two reasons. First, as Stglitz (1994) and others have shown the existence of informational and other imperfections lead to pervasive external effects invalidating the Arrow-Debreu model. Second, and more important for this paper, the normative concept of Pareto efficiency is too subjective and weak a standard for ethics and practical policymaking. An alternative standard based on a more objective valuation of individuality and capabilities with both Aristotlean and Hegelian connections (Sen 1992,1999; Sen and Nussbaum, 1992; Nussbaum, 1995; Khan, 1995 , 1998) can be a more solid standard of ethical evaluations.

[7] The careful reader will notice that I do not directly use the most obvious gambit offered by postmodernists, namely its self-referential inconsistency. Most philosophically unsophisticated versions of postmodernism in fact are self-refuting since they cannot assert the truth of their own positions while denying truth of *any* kind. However, I read Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari and that old 'maestro of suspicion', to use Ricoeur's phrase, Nietzsche as not simple relativists, but rather as radical critics of reason. Thus in Deleuze and Guattari, and in Derrida among the contemporaries there are arguments that rationally constrain reason without falling into self-contradiction. My purpose here is to put this chastened reason to work in a direction that turns away from both dogmatism and skepticism.

[8] This is, however, far from either an idealist or a materialist reading of Hegel. Rather, my reading is 'realist' as will become clear.

II. Modernism and Postmodernism

One could of course speak of both modernism and postmodernism in the plural. Exegetically minded scholars are particularly keen on doing so. However, my purpose is not to "interpret" or "reinterpret" this or that modern or postmodern thinker, but to unearth the common epistemological, ontological, moral (or amoral!) and aesthetic ground shared by them.

Ihab Hassan writes in a section of the conclusion of *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture*, "that the post modern debate drifted from America to Europe." In his *The Dismemberment of Orpheus* Hasan had already asked, "when did the Modern period end?" and had gone on to identify the turning point as early as the 1920s in literature. He asks the reader to contrast Edmund Wilson's *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature* with his own collection. The former carried a discussion of symbolism, Yeats, Valery, Elliot, Proust, Joyce and Stein. Hasan's own text weaves its way through pataphysics, surrealism, Kafka, existentialism, literature, Genet and Beckett. Hasan thinks Stein contributed to both but the crucial text is *Finnegan's Wake*. Therefore, he asks, "If we can arbitrarily state literary modernism includes certain works between Jarry's *Ubu Roi* (1896) and Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* (1931) where will we arbitrarily say that Postmodernism begins?" Aware of the irony of the origins of the postmodern turn he ends by declaring, "In any case Postmodernism includes works by writers as different as Barth, artheleme, eckers, ense, lancheft, orges, recht, urroughs, utir. Query: But is not *Ubu Roi* itself as Postmodern as it is Modern?" Despite this problem of demarcation Hasan's series of dichotomies may nevertheless be a set of useful contrasts.

Ihab Hasan's Dichotomies

Modernism	Postmodernism
Romanticism/Symbolism	Pataphysics/Dadaism
Form (conjunctive, closed)	Antiform (disjunctive, open)
Purpose	Play
Design	Chance
Hierarchy	Anarchy
Mastery/Logos	Exhaustion/Silence
Art Object/Finished Work	Process/ Performance/Happening
Distance	Participation
Creation/Totalization	Decreation/Deconstruction

Synthesis	Antithesis
Presence	Absence
Centering	Dispersal
Genre/Boundary	Text/lntertext
Paradigm	Syntagm
Hypotaxis	Parataxis
Metaphor	Metonymy
Selection	Combination
Root/Depth	Rhizome/Surface
Interpretation/Reading	Against Interpretation/Misreading
Signified	Signifier
Lisible (Readerly)	*Scriptible* (Writerly)
Narrative	Antinarrative
God the Father	The Holy Ghost
Symptom	Desire
Genital/Phallic	Polymorphous/Androgynous
Paranoia	Schizophrenia
Origin/Cause	Difference - Differance/Trace
Metaphysics	Irony
Determinacy	Indeterminacy
Transcendence	Immanence

As the astute reader will notice in the history of literature at least many of the postmodern traits are shared by many modernist works themselves. In his 1980 essay Hasan also presented "Five Paratactical Propositions about the Culture of Postmodernism":

1. Postmodernism depends on the violent transhumanization of the earth, wherein terror and totalitarianism, fractions and whole, poverty and power summon each other. The end may be cataclysm and/or the beginning of genuine planetization, a new era for the One and the Many...
2. Postmodernism derives from the technological extension of consciousness, a kind of twentieth century gnosis … The result is a paradoxical view of consciousness as information and history as happening.
3. Postmodernism, at the same time, reveals itself in the dispersal of the human—that is, of language—in the immanence of discourse and mind …

4. Postmodernism, as a mode of literary change, could be distinguished from the older avant-gardes (Cubism, Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism, etc.) as well as from modernism. Neither Olympian and detached like the latter nor Bohemian and fractious like the former, postmodernism suggests a different kind of accommodation between art and society …
5. Postmodernism veers toward open, playful, optative, disjunctive, displaced, or indeterminate forms, a discourse of fragments, an ideology of fracture, a will to unmaking, an invocation of silences—veers toward all these and yet implies their very opposites, their antithetical realities. It is as if *Waiting for Godot* found an echo, if not an answer, in *Superman*.

Leaving aside the genre-specific question of Dadaism, earlier included in cataloguing of postmodern traits and now seemingly excluded, one might wish to probe further about the condition for cataclysm or alternatively, genuine planetization mentioned in the first proposition. Likewise, the tantalizing suggested "different kind of accommodation between art and society" needs a kind of elaboration that is never offered. The fifth proposition offers some help in characterizing postmodern forms. We will see later that Derrida's characterizations of structure, sign and play take us to some of these conclusions through a more rigorous poststructuralist route.

Jean François Lyotard in his *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) claims that the term postmodern "designates the state of our culture following the transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth century have altered the game rules for science, literature and the arts." The more frequently used, or at least the more popular among the American academics is his characterization of the postmodern as "incredulity toward metanarratives."

Lyotard tries to be quite explicit about the modern/postmodern distinction. Thus he wants to use the term modern to "designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse … making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth."

Although he is critical of both Hegel and Marx (and other "totalizing" philosophers), Lyotard's further analysis of scientific knowledge as a form of discourse in bourgeois society is influenced by Marx's theory of the circuit of capital. Lyotard makes a distinction between "payment knowledge" and "investment knowledge" and focuses on their circulation:

> It is not hard to visualize learning circulating along the same lines as money, instead of for its "educational" value or political … importance; the pertinent distinction would no longer be between knowledge and ignorance, but rather, as is the case with money, between "payment knowledge" and "investment knowledge."
>
> (*The Postmodern Condition*, p. 6)

Characterizing eclecticism as "the degree zero" of contemporary culture, Lyotard (1979, p. 76) goes on to locate its basis in the power of capital:

> When power is that of capital and not that of party, the "transavantgardist" or "postmodern" (in Jencks's sense) solution proves to be better adapted than the antimodern solution. Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture: one listens to reggae, watches a Western, eats McDonald's food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and "retro" clothes in Hong Kong; knowledge is a matter for TV games. It is easy to find a public for eclectic works. By becoming kitsch, art panders to the confusion which reigns in the "tastes" of the patrons. Artists, gallery owners, critics and public wallow together in the "anything goes", and the epoch is one of slackening. But this realism of the "anything goes" is in fact that of money; in the absence of aesthetic criteria, it remains possible and useful to assess the value of works of art according to the profits they yield. Such realism accommodates all tendencies, just as capital accommodates all "needs", providing that the tendencies and needs have purchasing power. As for taste, there is no need to be delicate when one speculates or entertains oneself.

Lyotard seemingly gives up on the moral (hence questions of justice/injustice) in favor of the aesthetic and a state of mind like the Kantian *sublime*. In his later writings something like a fourth critique of Kant is attempted to salvage something from the ruins of epistemological and moral nihilism via the sublime and a mode of moral sensibility.[9] In the next section I question this move and present as an alternative a nonfoundational discourse on economic justice that does not require assumptions of an absolutely integrated subject, complete determinacy and universality. Readers of the postmodern literature are already familiar with the writings of Foucault, Lacan, Derrida and others on these. So without further reviewing what these others

[9]Thus under the subsection "Pretext" in *The Differend*, Lyotard refers to Kant's "historical-political texts" (the "fourth Critique") (p. xiii).

have said and the already large (and largely unilluminating derivative literature), I will proceed to examine the serious problems for a discourse on economic justice that an acceptance of the postmodern turn problems for a discourse on economic justice that an acceptance of the postmodern turn poses.

III. Postmodernism and Justice: Some Problems

In at least one influential self-presentation of the postmodern condition, cynicism would appear to emerge as the ground bass against which other baroque virtuosities are displayed. Lyotard (1988) seems to provide an explanation, even a justification for this state of affairs:

> The "philosophies of history" that inspired the nineteenth and twentieth centuries claim to assure passages over the abyss of heterogeneity or the event. The names which are those of "our history" oppose counterexamples to their claim.—Everything real is rational, everything rational is real: "Auschwitz" refutes speculative doctrine. This crime at least, which is real, is not rational. —Everything proletarian is communist, everything communist is proletarian: "Berlin 1953, Budapest 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968, Poland 1980" (I could mention others) refute the doctrine of historical materialism: the workers rose up against the Party.—Everything democratic is by and for the people, and vice versa: "May 1968" refutes the doctrine of parliamentary liberalism. The social in its everydayness puts representative institutions in check. —Everything that is the free play of supply and demand is favorable for the general enrichment, and vice versa: the "crisis of 1911 and 1929" refutes the post-Keynesian revision of that doctrine. The passages promised by the great doctrinal syntheses end in bloody impasses. Whence the sorrow of the spectators in this bloody end of the twentieth century.
>
> (*The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, pp. 179-180)

As the title of his book indicates, Lyotard wants to reduce all discourse to disputes between different "phrase-regimes." Lyotard wishes to distinguish a differend from a litigation. The former is a conflict that cannot be "equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments." Although he does not come out completely against theories that can make some kind of ontological claim about the structure of the social world and history as Rorty and Fish clearly do, his book veers dangerously close to the kind of anything goes vein of relativism that he wishes to avoid. I focus on Lyotard here because of the combination of the sense of responsibility and the sense of despair his works display so clearly. It is the particular clarity

with respect to the past history but at the same time a certain opaqueness with respect to our ability to make history that makes Lyotard's reading of Kant so poignant.

Lyotard's heterodox reading of Kant distinguishes among cognitive, practical and speculative reason in terms of their being different phrase-regimes. He reads Kant's late writings on freedom, democracy, progress and perpetual peace as a nascent fourth critique of political reason. However, from this beginning he turns to a skeptical aesthetic mode, trying heroically at the same time to connect the aesthetic judgment with practical reason or ethics. "… enthusiastic pathos conserves an aesthetic validity, it is an energetic sign, a tensor of Wunsch … The infinity of the Idea draws to itself all the other capacities, that is, all the other faculties, and produces an Affect "of the vigorous kind", characteristic of the sublime" (p. 169).

At best, however, this can only lead to an agnostic position with respect to any moral judgment including the justice or injustice of social norms. In producing what he intends to be a politicized reading of the Kantian sublime, Lyotard claims:

> you are phrasing … not according to the rule of direct presentation proper to cognitives but according to the free, analogical presentation to which dialectical phrases in general are held. You can then call upon certain phenomena given through intuition, but they cannot, however, have the value of exempla or of schemata in your argument … A single referent—say a phenomenon grasped in the field of human history—can be used *qua* example, to present the object of discourse of despair, but also … to present analogically the object of the discourse of emancipation. And along with this guiding thread, one can undertake an analogically republican politics, and be a moral politician. (Lyotard, p. 163)

But there is seemingly no way to justify either "the discourse of despair" or the "moral politician." If one weakens the case of morality so much and still wishes to defend it, one is left to make the gesture of a Tertullian, who said that he believed in God because it was absurd.

It is thus doubtful that the sublime as a figure of radical heterogeneity can rescue us from giving up the quest for morality and justice. The whole issue degenerates into an "as-if" game analogous to the defense of the maximizing agent by the Chicago economists.

> Because the feeling of the sublime is an affective paradox, the paradox of feeling publicly and as a group that something which is "formless" alludes to a beyond of experience, that feeling constitutes an "as-if presentation" of the Idea of civil society and even of cosmopolitical society, and thus an as-if presentation of the Idea of morality, right where that Idea nevertheless cannot be presented, within experience.

(Lyotard, p. 170)

An even more extreme drift towards a hazy relativism characterizes the writings of Baudillard. In case of Baudrillard, as Christopher Norris with respect to Lyotard and some deconstructionists points out there is a much greater willingness "to jettison every last notion of truth, justice, or critical understanding." Norris goes on to add provocatively:

> Another—exemplified by Lyotard—is the more refined version of postmodernist thinking that preserves those ideas but only on condition of driving a wedge between judgements of a speculative (ethical) order and cognitive truth-claims of whatever kind. Then again, there is the turn toward that thoroughly depoliticised version of deconstructionist thought that reduces all concepts to metaphors, all philosophy to an undifferentiated "kind of writing", and hence all history to a play of ungrounded figural representations. In each case—so I have argued—theory has served as an escape-route from pressing political questions and a pretext for avoiding any serious engagement with real-world historical events. Worst of all, these ideas deprive critical thought of one resource most needful at present, i.e. the competence to judge between good and bad arguments, reason and rhetoric, truth-seeking discourse and the "postmodern" discourse of mass-induced media simulation.

(Norris, p. 44)

A notable exception to this trend is Derrida, especially in his recent writings. I have argued elsewhere about the ethical aspects of the discourse presented by Deleuze and Guattari (in their case a similar assertion is made by Foucault in the preface to *Anti-Oedipus*). However, Derrida's formulations, when followed carefully, I will try to show, can be helpful in formulating a positive discourse on justice in general and economic justice in particular. In his response to Searle, Derrida denies that deconstruction suspends reference. Furthermore, he equates différance and reference, at least provisionally.

> A few moments ago, I insisted on writing, at least in quotation marks, the strange and trivial formula, "real-history-of-the-world", in order to mark clearly that the concept of text or of context which guides me embraces and does not exclude the world, reality, history. Once again … as I understand it (and I have explained why), the text is not a

book it is not confined in a volume itself confined to the library. It does not suspend reference—to history, to reality, to being, and especially not to the other since to say of history, of the world, of reality, that they always appear in an experience, hence in a movement of interpretation which contextualizes them according to a network of differences and hence of referral to the other, is surely to recall that alterity (difference) is irreducible. *Différance* is a reference and vice versa.

(Derrida, Limited Inc., p. 137)

Much earlier in his "Structure, Sign and Play," Derrida had remarked:

Tounée vers la présence, perdue ou impossible, de l'origine absente, cette thematique structuraliste de l'immédiateté rompue est donc triste, négative, nostalgique, coupable, rousseauiste, de la pensée du jeu dont l'affirmation nietzschéene, l'affirmation joyeuse du jeu du monde et de l'innocence du devenir, l'affirmation d'un monde de signes sans faute, sans vérité, sans origine, offert à une interprétation active, serait l'autre face. Cette affirmation détermine alors le-non--centre autrement que comme perte du centre. Et elle joue sans sécurité. Car il y a un jeu sûr: celui que se limite à la substitution de pièces données et existantes, presentes. Dans le hasard absolu, l'affirmation se livre aussi à l'indetermination génétique, à l'aventure seminale de la trace.

Derrida

Turned towards the presence, lost or impossible, of the absent origin, this structuralist thematic of broken immediateness is thus the sad, negative, nostalgic, guilty, Rousseauian face of the thought of free play of which the Nietzschean affirmation, the joyful affirmation of the free play of the world of signs without want, without truth, without origin would be the other face. This affirmation then determines the non-center as other than the loss of the center. And it plays without security. For there is a sure free play: that which is limited to the substitution of the given and existing, present pieces. In absolute randomness affirmation gives itself up also to the genetic indeterminacy, to the seminal adventure of the trace.

(my translation)

Is it possible to give expression to the capacity for free play, the fulfillment of need/desire without lapsing into mere "phrase-regimes"? Surprisingly an affirmative answer to this is possible. A rigorous blend of the "modernist" Hegel with poststructuralist Derrida is a tantalizing possibility that can advance the discourse on justice in the cultural context of postmodernism in interesting ways. In the rest of the paper I will show that such a revised, non-foundational epistemology does not lead to a free floating ontological and moral relativism. At the same time, by elaborating on Lacan's elucidation of the idea of the subject, I construct a dynamic concept of the subject so that "agency" is a concept that can be used even when shorn of its "traditional" modernist epistemological baggage. Finally, by bringing these concepts in direct confrontation with the world of economic relations, the question of rights, democracy and economic justice can be reformulated in the "postmodern" context without postmodern "phrase-regimes."[10]

IV. Democracy, Markets, Empowerment and Economic Justice Without Foundations

If the anti-foundational battle cry of the postmodernists is not to lead us to the doors of nihilism and relativism, what epistemological turn must be taken? Put in another way, is there a way to avoid foundations and speak of economic justice (or justice in general) at all?

Surprisingly, Hegel raised precisely this issue in his *Philosophy of Right*. Earlier, in both his *Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Science of Logic*, Hegel had shown how to dissolve the standpoint of the subject and begin the investigation of thinking without presuppositions. Quite remarkably this strategy allowed him to avoid the foundationalist fallacies of positing a predetermined given and a privileged determiner. At the same time he was able to avoid the trap of "anything goes" philosophical attitude.

Rejecting natural rights and justice on the grounds that these are foundational is not logically equivalent to saying that there is no alternative route to justice. Only a binary logic that reduces the universe of discourse to natural rights or nothing else can consistently claim that the

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[10] The reader will notice that I have not discussed Foucault's many interesting contributions. Lack of space is one reason. But the more important reason is the set of deep ambiguities in Foucault. Thus, he asks that we live with hyperpessimism, but at the same time endorses revolt. Some have conjectured that Foucault may have been struggling to reach an ethical position that would more consistently support a revolt-oriented, freedom-seeking stance. The following quote from one of his late 70s writings would tend to confirm such an assessment:

> There is no right to say: 'revolt for me, a final liberation is coming for everyone.' But I do not agree with someone who says: 'It is useless to revolt. It will always come to the same thing.' One does not make the law for the person who risks his life before power. Is there or is there not a reason to revolt?
>
> **(Foucault ,Inutile de se soulever? (**my translation)

denial of natural rights is to be equated with the proposition that it is not possible to talk about rights at all. Or, to reduce all such talk, as Lyotard does, to mere phrase-regimes can hardly be the most logical alternative if one can find a way of talking about rights and justice in a non-foundational way.

In fact, we can reject the standard phrase-regimes of contemporary ethics—utilitarianism, deontology and communitariasm — without falling prey to nihilism. Ironically, all three of these positions, although they contradict one another, also deny in various ways that reason can prescribe the ends of human actions. Thus, postmodernism, in a certain sense, carries the "rational" skepticism of these modernist positions to its ultimate irrationality.

The key to avoid both the limited rationality of modernism and the unlimited irrationality of certain kinds of postmodernism is to see right and justice within a framework of social interaction. In contrast with Nietzsche morality cannot be reduced to an individual's will to power in such a social context. Only rights recognized by others reciprocally can be rights as such.

The specific relations that constitute the economic interactions in society can then be brought under such a framework of rights. These rights are non-foundational because in order to build up this structure we begin from nothing but self-determining social individuals and their interactions. Initially, nothing but an abstract right of property in self can be seen with such beginnings. The important point to note is that no assumptions regarding the nature of individual self or any appeal to the natural laws need to be made.

Starting with such abstract rights of property, it is possible to move to rights within family, civil society and the state. Some of Hegel's views on these (especially family, constitutional monarchy or estates) are certainly outdated. The question can even be raised if these were the right prescriptions in his own time.

However, using Hegel's non-foundational approach, it is possible to rationally construct a structure of rights within which economic rights will take a prominent position. Economic rights have as their sphere both family and civil society. The sharing of household roles through mutual recognition between consenting adults who need not be heterosexuals is the cornerstone of rights and responsibilities within family. An important aspect is the protection and nurturing of children. Hence children, as soon as they can think and articulate their thoughts must also be thought of as bearers of right. The sharing of economic resources without gender or age bias is the major issue of household economic justice. It can only be resolved by recognizing rights that are real and rational.

The largest sphere of economic justice, is of course within the economic sphere itself. Here, the markets for labor[11], capital and consumption goods both facilitate self-determination and hamper it.[12] Markets facilitate self-determination by making it possible to exchange one kind of property for another according to the self-affirming needs of the individuals. However, under large-scale organizations owned by private individuals and pervasive inequalities in the distribution of wealth and income only some are allowed to use the market for their self-determination. Furthermore, pervasive monetary calculations orient even these individuals towards measuring their worth in purely monetary terms. A Veblenesque competition for more money in order to have more worth results in an endless striving to increase wealth. The production of a civilized cultured way of life may be an accident and usually not valued as much as the pursuit of wealth. Economic justice under such a regime therefore is not *Pareto Optimality*. It is not the distributive justice of equating marginal product with real wage. It is not even Rawlsian maximin criterion, although under conditions of extreme inequality it may be a good first move.

Economic justice may require more equality of resources than there is at present. But as a coherent concept, it demands freedom as self-determination of individuals in the economic sphere. Since the structure of private ownership capitalism leads to "freedom" for a few, such a system cannot be just. The late socialist system also was not just, since resources were politically controlled and markets were suppressed even where they could be used to further the self-determination of individuals. Of the twin purposes of markets, ---self-determination and wealth creation--- the former is an end in itself, while the latter is merely a means. Economic justice with respect to the operation of markets, therefore requires creating a structure of ownership and distribution that will allow self-determination for its own sake and also creation of quantitatively enough and qualitatively the right kind of wealth for making the need-satisfaction of a progressively more civilized society possible.

Given this clarification of economic justice without foundational premises, is it possible to claim that democracy means the upholding of such justice? The answer is that it does so, but only in an abstract way. To make democracy and justice concrete we need to specify theoretically at least

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[11] The market for labor or (in Marx's terms) labor power as a commodity gives rise to special problems. These are analyzed separately in Khan(2001), starting from Marx's early analysis of alienation and later analysis of abstract labor in Capital.

[12] This critical strategy has something in common with Polanyi's critique of marketization of land, labor and money as fictitious commodities. It does, differ, however in acknowledging a contradictory, but transitional role of markets in facilitating individual self-determination. The double movement arises in a deeper way from the (at least partial) failure of self-determination in a 'free' market system.

the minimally adequate institutional requirements. This will be done in the context of further developing democratic theory as promised at the outset. However, there is one more difficult postmodern hurdle to jump before this can be done rigorously.

V. Is there a subject?

Even if the foregoing argument is accepted, there still remains a final problem. Indeed this problem is thorny enough to make the task of plucking the flowers of democracy and economic justice seem completely hopeless. This is the problem of agency or—as it is well known in the French postmodernist and poststructuralist circles—the problem of the subject.

In France it was made popular by Althusser's discussions of ideology.[13] However, the deeper philosophical and psychoanalytic motivations for considering the subject problematic have been articulated by Lacan.

In Lacan's view the subject has both consciousness and unconscious motivations. The unconscious part is the source of the problem. No matter how coherent (and thus capable of agency) the person might *seem to be* as a *conscious* agent, the unconscious is in fact quite chaotic.

Lacan buttresses his claim with the hypothesis that the structure of the unconscious is the same as the structure of repressed signifiers in early entry into the symbolic realm by the child. This chain of repressed signifiers hides the actual incoherence of the subject's subjectivity.

Lacan's position raises several intriguing possibilities for explaining ideology, not the least of which is the explanation of patriarchy. By an assimilation of what he calls the "phallus" as a transcendental signifier while other contradictory signifiers are simply suppressed, patriarchy gains a semblance of naturalness. As long as the socialization processes that make such simultaneous transcendence and repression possible, patriarchy cannot be eradicated. More generally, the much vaunted individualism in a bourgeois society can also be seen as a suppression of all contradictory tendencies and relegation of such tendencies to the unconscious.

Undoubtedly there is a great deal of truth in this, even if one does not go all the way towards accepting all the pieces of this neo-Freudian poststructuralist semiotic psychoanalysis. However, the leap from a nuanced analysis of the unconscious aspects of the psyche to the conclusion that there is no subject with a moral capacity for action is illegitimate for several reasons.[14]

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[13]See, for example, Althusser's essays on ideology in *For Marx and Lenin and Philosophy*. Althusser seems to misconstrue Lacan's concept of the *imaginary* (and implicity, the mirror stage) in the former.

[14]It is not clear if Lacan himself would go so far, but most postmodernists, French and non-French alike (e.g., Foucault and Rorty), have taken this position.

First, the idea of a subject can have a limited warrant even if the unconscious motivations are discerned as contradictory. This is close to the idea of a juridical subject. The potential for moral capacity of such a subject is weaker than the formulation that follows. Nevertheless, even such weakly constituted, quasi-juridical subjects can serve as putative agents of moral actions.

The second and more important objection to the Lacanian fallacy is that Lacan's position can actually be used effectively to reformulate the view of a subject. In fact, recognizing the inevitable unconscious contradictions allows one to distinguish between two kinds of subjecthood in a dynamic sense.[15]

On the one hand we have the (relatively) unaware subject who is the ideological construct "individual." Such a person may be shored up by all the reassuring dogmas and ideologies of our contemporary society. The crack in the mirror where such a person observes himself is invisible as long as he is ignorant of his own inner turmoils at the conscious level. This is not to say that archaic thought-processes or emotions do not invade the person from time to time. And this happens, not as is usually assumed, just in a dream-state. As Lear (1990, p. 37) expresses it in connection with his (re)reading of Anna O.'s fantasy:

> It is because fantasies of mental functioning are pressed from the beginning of mental life and actually influence mental functioning that psychoanalysis can be a "talking cure." If mental functioning were as remote from a person's self-understanding as, say brain functioning, there would be no reason to think that a person could tell us about his mental processes. But it seems that even the most archaic unconscious mental process contains within it an implicit fantasied "theory" of that process. A "theory" of the mental process is part of the person's (perhaps unconscious) experience of that process. Thus the fantasied "theory" becomes part and parcel of the mental process, and in altering the fantasy one alters the mental process itself.

Lear explains that the strangeness (to us) of the above formulation comes only from our habit of equating the fantasy to "a mental image, projected on the screen of the mind." But the confusion dissolves if we ask: how can such an image affect mental functioning? Without assuming in a circular way that mental functioning is affected by images of its functioning, no

[15] I hope it will become clear in the following discussion that actually there is a continuum of subjects within this dynamic setting.

answer consistent with the mental image equation seems possible. The way out of this conundrum is to reject the equation itself. As Lear puts it:

> A person's subjectivity is powerful not merely because it is striving for expression but also because it may be expressed archaically. Archaic mental functioning knows no firm boundary between mind and body, and so archaic mind is incarnate in the body. Although fantasies may be expressed in images, they may also occur in paralyses, vomiting, skin irritations, spasms, ulcers, etc., and even by being dramatically acted out by the person whose fantasy it is. In this way a person's subjectivity permeates his being. So, for example, if a person's fantasied "theory" of catharsis is that it is an emotional purgation, this "theory" should be manifest in various aspects of that person's experience: he may feel "drained", or "depleted", "spent", "exhausted", "empty", after a cathartic emotional experience. This is the sense in which every person must have the truth within him. (pp. 37-38)

Actually, Lacan's discussion of "petit objet “a" shows that within the context of a radical objects relations theory the development of the *homlette* does leave behind residues of archaic mental functioning. Without considerable indulgence in a "talking cure," perhaps of the Lacanian variety, one may not be able to give conscious, conceptualized symbolic form to these archaic fantasies. But this in no way negates the fact that such is the way of the unconscious expressing itself.

Thus, the insertion of the child into the *symbolic* universe creates both repression and the possibilities for overcoming the repression. It is this second aspect of *the symbolic* that holds the subject's potential for moral capacity.

As a person yet unable to fully conceptualize her condition, she is not incapable of a moral personality. As Jonathan Cohen argues persuasively in his "A View of the Moral Landscape of Psychoanalysis," the trained analyst can perceive both the moral capacities and moral failures of such "subjects." Conceptually, the argument simply establishes the possibility of the subjecthood of a person. The precise content of the subjectivity may indeed be unhealthy in a clinical sense. But such characterization only re-establishes the moral potential of the person as an agent. Denying this potential is itself an act of ideological repression.

Such considerations lead us to think of a second type of moral agent. This is a subject whose awareness has unfolded to such an extent that she is able to *conceive* of herself as a moral agent. However, such awareness also encompasses the repression that accompanies our insertion into the symbolic. Thus her moral insights about herself and the world also include a recognition

f human vulnerability, epistemic shortcomings and the need for a *twofold dialogue*. This dialogue is, on the one hand, a conversation within oneself[16] and, on the other, a dialogue with the outside world. Depending on the state of the individual psychoanalytic therapy may or may not be necessary for such subjectivity to occur. However, as I have argued elsewhere (Khan, 1992, 1993a,b, 1995), in a just and democratic society, the resources for such therapy will be available to all.

Here a further source of confusion may arise. There is a widespread view both within and outside of psychoanalysis that analysis "shrinks the realm of the moral responsibility." As Nancy Sherman puts it, "there is the surface paradox that while morality is ubiquitous, the clinical hour boasts of time and space that is morally neutral, …" (Sherman, p. 1). But as Wallwork (1991) has argued, psychoanalysis is uncompromisingly situated within an ethical perspective. Sherman follows and develops Aristotle's critique of the Socratic denial that one can know what is good and fail to act on it. Aristotle, of course, claimed that Socrates' denial of *akrasia* was simply "against the plain facts" (*ta phainomena*).

However, Aristotle views *akrasia* as an *intellectual* failure rather than a failure of desire. In discussing Freud's own case of being afflicted by the "blindness of the seeing eye" in his struggle to understand the case of Miss Lucy R.'s knowing and not knowing her love for her employer, Sherman explains:

> The Socratic dogma that knowledge can't be tyrannized by desire has long been abandoned. But against Kant, it is not simply the inner tribunal of conscience and moral judgment that will track down secret but motivating desires. Conflictual and concealed mental contents need a therapy of self-knowledge that does something other than continue to disavow them. They need to be heard from, in parliamentary fashion, and given their own voice as a part of coming to be united with avowed and endorsed interests. Therapeutically working through what is disavowed or repressed requires freedom from the stance of moral appraisal, even if the decision to submit to the analytic process might be thought of as a morally praiseworthy act in the most general sense of taking charge of one's character, and pursuing that project with courage. (Sherman, p. 13)
>
> But the outcome of the therapy when it succeeds is to produce a new type of agency.
>
> No longer split off from emotion's testimony, agency takes on a newer and bolder form. *Psychoanalysis transforms the notion of moral agency by bringing the emotions to*

[16]Or, to be more precise, an "interior monologue" where the unconscious processes are symbolized, interpreted and conceptualized.

> *the center*. In an ironic way, the "talking therapy" seems to be able to bring to moral agency those potential allies that moral theory, so often on its own, does not quite know how to train or enlist. (Sherman, pp. 22-23, emphasis mine)

Therefore, for both types of subjects, it should be emphasized, the possibility of acting justly (or otherwise) remains open. In an unjust economy and society, most are victims of oppression and injustice. In a nearly just society, such institutionalized injustice disappears, but there could still be unjust actions by individuals for which they should be culpable. However, in a well ordered society, the view towards crime and punishment may be very different from ours. Instead of responding to issues of guilt with conventional punishment, a more compassionate, therapeutic approach may be taken.

The point of this paper, of course, is not to produce a blueprint for a future just society, but to open up the possibility of such a discourse even under the postmodern conditions of epistemic uncertainty and anti-foundationalism. Enough has been said, I believe, to show that even a radical epistemic uncertainty is consistent with the two kinds of subjects discussed here. The previous discussion of a Hegelian approach to foundationalism was intended to show that anti-foundationalism is also consistent with a systemic approach to economic and social justice. Thus both at the level of large-scale social and economic structures and at the level of the individual's epistemological uncertainties, anti-foundationalism need not lead to skepticism, relativism and ultimately nihilism.

VI. De/Reconstructions of Democracy, Women's Empowerment and Justice: Fictions, Frictions or 'Factions'?

After all this heavy philosophical lifting, it should be clear that democracy and justice including justice with regards to women's empowerment can be both fictions and frictions. Given the ideological distortions embodied in a commodity economy that operates in terms of exchange value and the value form in general, such fictions are necessary and necessarily true at one level. But such fictions are *imaginary* only in Lacan's sense, i.e., they are neither real nor unreal. Since they are simultaneously facts and fictions, one could call them '**factions'** by coining a new term combining both fact and fiction. They exist, but their ontological status depends on a deeper causal structure that a reality-oriented dialectics can uncover. This deeper level, uncovered by an approximately true scientific theory of social, economic and political relations shows the fictions as unstable forms that can be changed because there are deep and permanent frictions within the

system. These deep conflicts and contradictions create the potential for change. Thus these **factions** also carry the potential for radical, system-transforming **actions.**

Thus, the triumph of globalist neoliberalism already seems to have passed its moment of glory. Its moment of truth is drawing near with increased friction even among the ruling elites of the various nation-states and some doubts among the leaders of the international organizations. The mass demonstrations against WTO in places like Seattle and Quebec City may be harbingers of further resistance from below. If so, then Polanyi's idea of a double movement will be validated.

In conjunction with such real world developments, the arguments developed here lead to the hope and theoretical possibilities for a deeper form of democracy and justice. I have dealt with these issues more extensively elsewhere. I will simply summarize the major aspects of what I have called the structure of **deep democracy** elsewhere.

Deep democracy is characterized by a dynamic concept of citizenship and **mass political activism**. Grasping theory means active practice and further development of theory through practice. In order to have a fighting chance of success, certain structural and procedural conditions must be fulfilled.

The concept of deep democracy rests crucially on egalitarian and anti-authoritarian bases. The set of background conditions that were alluded to above, must be specified clearly for it to be a coherent concept at all. Furthermore, the requirement that every citizen must count genuinely, calls for giving as much institutional detail as possible without engaging in the hopelessly arrogant exercise of drawing up a blueprint. Gilbert (1990) and Khan (1992, 1998) have offered the following conditions. The list is not intended to be exhaustive but is meant to contain more than a minimal set. As George Kateb (1984) and Alan Gilbert (1990) point out, these are also **cluster properties.** A good many of them will need to be realized together for democracy to have any depth at all, and for it to have a reasonable chance of survival.

Cluster conditions of democracy:

1. ending of economic and other status inequalities;

2. public emphasis on furthering democratic autonomy, internationalism, and individuality;
3. adequate incomes for all socially recognized work, as well as for children, the handicapped, the aged, and others not able to work in order to promote equality of capability;
4. respect for and articulation of differences in public life and within parties;
5. downward democratic congruence of and within ordinary social institutions, including work place democracy;
6. debate over the history and future of the movement -- the nature of deep democracy -- in neighborhood assemblies and schools;
7. cultivation of respect for civil disobedience, strikes, and other acts of protest on major public issues;
8. integration of local and national leaders into features of ordinary economic and political life and creation of arenas for criticism;
9. curtailment of all direct political intervention in the arts, religion, and personal life;
10. establishment of independent judicial, policy, communication, and electoral review bodies;
11. diversity of perspective in communications and education;
12. use of differential, serial referenda on central issues;
13. public funding of issue-oriented committees as well as parties;
14. takeover of some security and civil judicial functions by neighborhood or regional democratic associations; abolition of centralized, especially secret police powers and units;
15. universal public service, military or community; restructuring of armed forces in a defensive, civilian-oriented direction; removal of authoritarianism of rank and status, and institution of democratic unit organization, allowing serious discussion of policy;
16. proportional representation of parties;

17. abolition of the patriarchy;
18. adoption of democratic child - rearing practices;
19. full freedom of social intercourse of diverse groups;
20. full freedom of diverse cultural expression;
21. encouragement of the arts and varying modes of expression so that every individual can experience and struggle with the challenge of non-dominating discourse;
22. practice of radical forms of individual and group subjectivity leading to what Guattari has termed the molecular revolution.
23. adoption of technology and innovation systems which will reinforce the conditions above, rather than undercutting them.

In light of the above, it is possible to de/reconstruct in paricular, the rhetoric of women's empowerment in international organizations. One particular point of entry can be the rhetoric of 'gender mainstreaming'. For example, one UN document states:

> Mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. The ultimate goal of this strategy is to achieve gender equality.[17]

It is easy to see the pallid bureaucratic prose and the declaration of pious 'ultimate' goals that are the hallmarks of international organizations' favorite rhetorical strategies. What is perhaps less obvious is the action orientation. Indeed, my own personal experience with several such organizations confirm that 'action' or policy initiatives phrases occupy not only large rhetorical space but also under some circumstances form a real operational agenda. Issues of efficiency to one side, it will certainly be a onesided ideological assault on the actors in these organizations to claim that it is all rhetoric. If we accept this characterization then both the conservative and radical critics of these organizations who assert that empowerment of women is nothing but empty rhetoric mischaracterize the modalities of international organizations in this sphere. In

[17] http://www.un.org/womenwatch/asp/user/list.asp?ParentID=10314

fact, both casual evidence and careful empirical assessments show progress in specific areas such as women's literacy, life expectancy, health and other areas where sustained international and national policy interventions have taken place. Therefore, in these cases at least---again leaving questions of efficiency aside--- both conservatives and radicals seem to be unwilling to confront the empirical evidence. Furthermore, for the conservative side the situation is worse yet, since the empirical evidence confirms the theoretical critique presented earlier. The interesting question therefore, is about the liberal claims that reforming the global capitalist system in specific areas is the only alternative. In fact, I will discuss a more refined and nuanced claim which is social democratic from a more radical perspective. I will take the writings of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum and show the limits of capabilities enhancement of women without deep democracy. This will accomplish two goals. First, it will be an a fortiori critique of 'liberal' internationalism. Second, it will show both the limits of social democratic thought and ways to overcome these through building deep democratic social and political movements in South Asia..

To put this in a broader overall perspective, let us recall that within this project of promoting global 'deep democracy' through the progressive equalization and enhancement of social capabilities described schematically above, certain items such as ecological justice, sharing of wealth across borders and gender justice have proved to have both logical and normative salience. Here, I develop one theme--- namely, the problem of developing women's capabilities as an important aspect of global justice--- as an example to illustrate the practical relevance of the more radical version of capabilities approach that I defend .

Here, too, as alluded to before, the two important modern pioneers are Sen and Nussbaum. Sen's *Inequality Reexamined* has an important chapter on Gender and Capabilities. Sen has contributed to a rigorous examination of the connections between gender and capabilities both conceptually and through empirical work in collaboration with others. *Women, Culture and Development*--- Nussbaum's edited volume with Jonathan Glover as the coeditor--- is another landmark contribution to the field of gender and development. Nussbaum (2000) is also a most illuminating contribution, but here I will focus on the pioneering 1995 edited volume for the most part. Incidentally, Nussbaum (1995) also takes issue with certain relativist postmodern criticisms of 'essentialism' and defends an Aristotlean 'essentialist' conception of capabilities here as well. Jonathan Glover contributes a balanced and judicious essay defending 'reasonable' interventions while avoiding 'policy imperialism' from above. There is also an important essay by Sen on gender inequality and theories of justice in the third part of the book.

The book begins with a concrete case study of women's right to employment in India and Bangladesh based on her fieldwork by Martha Chen. Apart from the editors, a number of different perspectives on methodology and foundations of conceptualizing women's equality are presented. For example, Onora O'Neill presents a vigorous case against using preference satisfaction as the normative criterion in economics. She couples this with an equally vigorous defense of the capabilities approach. She is, however, a Kantian and weaves skillfully the capabilities approach with a form of the Kantian principle that we not act on principles that can not be acted upon by all and argues that such a Kantian principle can serve as a valuable test for viable social policies. Her arguments result in showing that victimization, 'by violence, by coercion, by intimidation, is simply unacceptable. Inter alia, this is also a powerful condemnation of the victimization of women.

Hilary Putnam defends a pragmatic ethical approach close to John Dewey's position that there could be a rational basis for articulating and holding onto an ethical position. Although, as Linda Alcoff points out in her comments, some feminists have followed philosophers such as Nietzsche and Foucault in order to criticize the kind of 'rationalistic' approach Putnam defends, the point that democratic processes are necessary in Putnam's argument seems to be intact. In my defense of a deeper form of democracy, I have emphasized the need for respecting differences, and the role of power and desire as well, without making the last two items either epiphenomena or overwhelmingly arbitrary. Indeed, the recognition of the *'Dionysian'* aspects of human nature leads to the need for a structure and procedures for democracy that will both protect individuals from tyranny and promote their social capabilities in an interactive, causally reciprocal and efficacious manner.

Respecting differences among cultures does not preclude a consideration of cross-cultural standards of justice. This is an important conclusion drawn by Seyla Benhabib in the Nussbaum-Glover volume. There are internal debates within each culture about justice, as Sen and others have also pointed out. There may be sufficient common ground among seemingly different cultures in their critical and reflective discourses on ethics and justice. This points to the possibility of discussing women's capabilities from a global and objective perspective. There are a number of other essays--- conceptual and empirical--- including the highly relevant and important essays in Part IV which give regional perspectives on women's equality from China, Mexico, India and Africa.

From matters of basic functionings such as health and survival to issues related to political voice--- in short, the whole spectrum of functionings related to self-determination--- there is by now compelling recorded evidence of discrimination against women almost everywhere in the world. In developing countries, along with general discrimination, there are also important regional variations. Even with great poverty, sub-Saharan Africa shows less gender discrimination in basic health matters than the wealthy Indian state of the Punjab, for example. This also allows us to illustrate the severity of such discrimination in some Asian countries in particular.

For example, the female-male ratio in sub-Saharan Africa is 102.2 to 100. The same ratio for many Asian, Latin American and North African countries is much lower--- in fact the female percentage is less than male percentage. In order to dramatize the issue, Sen has expressed this gap as the absolute number of 'missing women'. Following this approach, in the 1990s, the number of missing women in Southeast Asia was 2.4 million; in Latin America it was 4.4 million; in North Africa, 2.4 million; in Iran, 1.4 million; in China 44 million; in India 36.7 million; in West Asia, 4.3 million.

According to Dreze and Sen (1989), in India there are more girls dying than boys, i.e. mortality rates are higher for the girls. Additionally, the mortality rates are higher for women than men in all age groups until the late 30s. As Chen, Nussbaum and others have pointed out, income poverty alone cannot explain this tragic fact. Social and political arrangements including what commonly goes under the names of customs and culture are also implicated. The limits of cultural relativism become apparent in such a defining case as women's mortality. Increasingly, the women and the poor themselves are speaking out and asking for solutions (Narayan et. al. 2000a,b).

Does this imply that 'enlightened' policy makers and 'foreign aid' workers including the NGOs have the moral right to impose their policies on the women in poor communities? Although the volume just discussed is unclear on this issue, a reconstruction along the lines of deep democratic theory developed in this paper would suggest a more autonomous approach. What we really need are new institutions inclusive of women, led by them locally and working cooperatively with the other democratic institutions. In other words, promotion of deep democracy at the local level with active participation and leadership from local women is a necessary condition for real empowerment and emancipation.

It is also an implication of this type of policy and institutional approach that a serious attempt must be made to collect and interpret the relevant information regarding the functionings and capabilities of women. Indicators such as life expectancy, females as a percentage of total population and other demographic data are, needless to say, as relevant as ever. Social indicators for education and rights to participate in social life are also crucial. But, in addition, political indicators of democratic rights and democratic participation are of great importance. Only when women have the rights and are actually participating at all levels of political organization, and indeed leading many of them, is it possible to claim that positive political freedoms really exist.

The most important limit that a social democratic conception--- and the overall inconsistent communist conception of the third international---- of politics must face is their lack of faith in mass activism from below and the ability of masses to develop radical subjectivities. I have already shown how cynical varieties of postmodernism also deny such radical subjectivities from below. Yet the theoretical extension of the standard conceptualization of capabilities in the Sen – Nussbaum repertoire that explicitly stresses the social embeddedness and radically deep democratic perspective can offer a way out. In a manner analogous to the concept of multitude in Hardt and Negri, the deep democratic perspective relies on the subjectivities of the masses to

transform the existing structures. In the particular case of women's empowerment, it is the group of oppressed women which can be at the forefront of the struggles by the multitude.

What kind of movements can offer the best hope in South Asia? Before answering this question it needs to be remembered that historically both within the Gandhian and the socialist/communist movements in South Asia women have been politically engaged and in some cases in the vanguard. Given the space limitations, I will nention just two pertinent examples, one from each broad class of political and social movement. From the Gandhian perspective, it is first and foremost the Indian woman who can grasp and fight for that most advanced Gandhian ideal polity, the *Ramrajya*.[18] From the incredibly rich ---and virtually unknown in the Western academe---- history of peasant struggles, I will pick only one woman leader, Ila Mitra. Together with her husband Ramen Mitra, she provided courageous leasership in the famous *Santal* revolt in North Bengal. I interviewed this legendary leader in 1994 in Kolkata. In addition to her courage and steadfastness--- she was tortured and raped repeatedly while in custody but refused to recant---- I was deeply impressed by her strategic vision and unshakeable faith in the ability of ordinary men and women to transform this world into a better one.[19] The history of Bangladesh liberation movement and the role of women at all levels from 1969 to 1972 and afterwards also confirms this hope.[20]

However, those historical movements for various reasons have collapsed. Without being nostalgic, it is time to look at many ongoing subaltern movements[21] such the ones waged by the Dalits, Narmada bachao andolon, landless women in various parts of India, Pakistan, Baqngladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka carefully to see how these movements can be deepened and in which respects they not only resist hegemony but can also overcome them. In this respect, the history of direct struggles against both domestic power structures and imperialism has many lessons to offer. At this stage, an articulate militancy with biopolitical awareness that is internationalist is the best way to summarize the present and future tasks of an integrated movement from below spearheaded by women.

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[18] See Gandhi, 'To Women'(1920); also speech on April 2, 1921; 'My Notes--- Misinterpreting Ramarajya' May25, 1921. Also Bhikhu Parekh(1999)

[19] see also , Shamsur Rahman. Kaler Dhuloy Lekha(Writings in the Dust of Time), Dhaka: Annaprakash,2004 pp.242-246.

[20] See for example Imam(1986) and Alam(1993).

[21] For a historical perspective see, Guha, Ranajit ed. Subaltern Studies vols.I-VI, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982-90. see also Chatterjee, Partha. The Natiom and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993. Chatterjee discusses some complex cases of individual women in chapters six and seven. The issues related to peasants and outcasts are discussed in chapters eight and nine respectively.

Conclusions

I started by accepting the validity of many of the criticisms of modernity by some leading postmodern thinkers.From this initial position, I have tried to consider the postmodernist positions themselves with regards to democracy and justice by paying careful attention to the arguments of these leading postmodernists. Barring a nihilism that rules out arguments entirely, such a procedure seems reasonable. My ultimate objective was to validate the possibility of radical subjectivites---in particular of women in South Asia----from below.

Following this procedure theoretically, Lyotard's characterization of the discourse on morality and justice as phrase-regimes has been shown to lead to an ethical impasse. His appeal to the Kantian sublime, in this context, would seem to be a **category mistake.** The aesthetic category of sublime does not fit the requirements of moral judgments even in Kantian terms.

Epistemologically, the postmodern dilemma arises from a correct critique of metaphysics and transcendentalism. However, the critique is partial and negative. It is partial in the sense that it does not take the challenge of Kant to develop normativity seriously enough to explore alternatives as Hegel did. It, therefore, pursues entirely the negative critical path leading to thoroughgoing skepticism and nihilism.

Derrida's belated attempts to rescue philosophy from a linguistic nihilism may succeed. But it still falls far short of offering a positive account of normativity. A critical overcoming of modernism simply cannot be found in the postmodern turn.[22]

I have offered as an alternative to natural law and transcendental norms an approach based on Hegel's explorations in dialectics. As Winfield and others have pointed out, this approach is also anti-foundational. However, by following the rational demands of self-determination, it is possible to break out of the vicious circle of skepticism. Instead, a progressive structure starting with the minimum structure of freedom as self-determination can be built up.

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[22] Once again, Foucault is the most complex among the postmoderns. In particular, his notion of biopolitics carries within it both a critique of the societies of control and the hope and possibility of overcoming repression and domination that he never systematically explored The latter is thus only a latent possibility that Foucault could not bring himself to recognize fully.For more on this, see Khan (2001).

Following this alternative offers a way of exploring democracy, women's empowerment and economic justice. A concrete set of institutions consistent with the development of self-determination can be seen as necessary for the idea of economic justice to have meaning. In the spheres of production, distribution, exchange, law and contracts among others, the development of appropriate economic and political institutions allowing this inter-subjective idea of freedom to unfold becomes the thematic development of economic justice.

An important problem in this context is the coherence of the concept of the moral subject. By carefully considering poststructuralist psychoanalytical theory of Lacan and others a dynamically oriented approach to the question of the subject becomes possible. Pre-Freudian thinkers such as Hegel or Marx did not see the formation of the individual in all its deeply problematic aspects. However, the "speaking subject," though not innocent (as Hélène Cixous wittily put it), is nevertheless capable of agency under specific social and economic conditions. A continuum of subjectivity ending with the fully liberated individual offers various possible levels of moral agency. In an economically and socially unjust setting radical analytic and social interventions will be necessary for these possibilities to materialize.

Economic justice and democracy, therefore, require a coherent set of positive conditions. They are part and parcel of the need for rational autonomy in our world. Reasonably enough, even if we choose to call such a world postmodern, a discourse on economic justice and democracy is both necessary and possible. It is encouraging to think that such discourses are not just phrase-regimes. A realist political economic theory can help us look beyond the fiction of the holy trinity of free markets, democracy and justice, to find the frictions that underlie this trinity, and to face these frictions and contradictions without fear of inconsistency or incoherence. A deep theory of democracy and justice necessarily leads to a deep commitment to uphold and extend human rights by building the institutions of deep democracy. This is simultaneously the hope and challenge that this theory of democracy brings to the activists.

Applying this theory concretely, I have deconstructed the rhetoric of international organizations on women's empowerment. However, shallow and self-serving as this rhetoric is, it nevertheless can lead to a limited improvement in women's status contrary to the claims of the conservatives. Furthermore, the theory can also be used to de/reconstruct the liberal and social democratic positions on women's empowerment. Such a deep democratic perspective in South Asia focuses attention on enhancing social capabilities through all means, but particularly through the political self-activities of the multitude---- most importantly the radical subjectivities and actions of the most oppressed women who can and will increasingly take leading roles in overcoming the rule of global capital.

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